COMMUNITY INITIATIVES

Sugar Hill: Thoughts on Cultural Conservation

Ned Kaufman

Recently, a panel discussion on preserving the heritage of Sugar Hill was held. The neighborhood had been important to the Harlem Renaissance and was a powerful symbol of achievement for many African Americans in the 1920s and later. Two discussants were long-time Harlem residents and civic activists: Michael Henry Adams, a preservation advocate, and John Reddick, an architect and urban designer. The discussion became particularly interesting when, turning a sharp corner, it unexpectedly confronted a disagreement that got into the very meaning of heritage.

Sugar Hill is a neighborhood rich in story and myth, but some of its aging rowhouses and apartment buildings are sliding into disrepair. Adams asserted that to preserve the area's heritage, it was imperative to restore and maintain the buildings. If that meant turning Sugar Hill into an expensive and largely white neighborhood, so be it: heritage must be preserved...by any means necessary, as one might say.

Reddick wanted just as passionately to preserve Sugar Hill's heritage, but countered that it would be lost, not saved, if the neighborhood became a well-heeled white enclave. Indeed, no amount of architectural restoration could preserve the area's heritage, if the community most intimately connected with its history were swept away. That community was Sugar Hill's heritage. Reddick's prescription: provide housing and other forms of social assistance to sustain the existing, largely low-income, African American community.

This represents a puzzling situation, for both views seemed to contain profound, if unreconcilable truths. Yet both also seemed harsh. Adams was willing to sweep away a community in pursuit of preservation. Reddick wanted to exclude outsiders in pursuit of the same goal. Both positions were built upon surprisingly generous views of what heritage is.

It is easier to see the generosity in Reddick's proposal. For Reddick, heritage is not a musty relic of the past: it is a connection with history that people recreate through their lives. It is about continuity. If African Americans 50 or 60 years ago aspired to live in Sugar Hill and created a remarkable community there, then African Americans living there now, walking in their footsteps, are preserving their heritage by living it. Reddick's argument draws on a powerful vein of current thinking about cultural conservation, one relevant to Native Americans (and Hawaiians and Alaskans), to family farmers, Chesapeake Bay fisherman, and indeed to numerous residents of communities across the country.

Adams is generous too. If heritage is not something to be lived, it is something to be treasured and passed down. And Adams evidently believes that white people could preserve the heritage of an African American community. And if whites could be the loving stewards of black heritage, blacks could presumably do the same for Koreans, Koreans for Jews, Jews for Irish, and perhaps even suburbanites for farmers, and farmers for Kiowas or Crows.

In New York, where constant change is celebrated—while imposing high social and personal costs—it seems that some degree of community stabilization, à la Reddick, is almost necessary. Alas, given the political realities, it might also be impossible. Adams' vision of race-blind heritage conservation seems equally impossible, yet just as necessary, for if people cannot cross social fences to care for each other's heritage, the preservation of any heritage in a place like New York could become difficult, to say the least.

All of which begs the question of what, exactly, heritage is. And here Adams and Reddick differ, though perhaps more subtly than it might seem. Both value architecture, and both value history. But for Adams, it seems that the stories live mainly in the buildings, whereas for Reddick they live mainly in people. Thus, for Reddick cultural conservation requires community conservation, while for Adams, it requires residents with disposable income.

It would be hard to pin political labels to these contrasting views: neither is exactly conservative or liberal. But their consequences are highly political indeed. One point of view is willing to direct social resources to shoring up a community sorely lacking in market power; the other to allow market forces to displace that community. Preference of one view, for example the use of shared resources to stabilize an existing community rather than see it swept away, for another may stem more from ones politics than any heritage theory.

The fact is heritage is always political. And preservationists should always be alert to the politics of what we do as heritage professionals. That is not to prohibit compromise. But recognizing that our actions will have political

consequences—whether or not we consciously intend them—may help us integrate our politics with our heritage practice. At the same time, if we let ourselves think politically, we may also recognize the limits of what heritage conservation can do. The campaign to save New York's African Burial Ground set out to push a new awareness of African Americans' historical presence into the foreground of New Yorkers' minds. It succeeded brilliantly: consciousness was truly changed. But it did not require the fight for economic, social, and political parity. How could it? Some battles can be fought on the grounds of cultural conservation. Others must be engaged on their own terms.

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AARCH Building in Frederick, MD

Arches hold up bridges, attach one spot to another, and catch your eye along the freeway letting you know food is just ahead. A group of museum and library professionals, academics, students, and a variety of community volunteers in Frederick, Maryland are using this image as an inspiration as they identify, document, and preserve African American resources in the community called AARCH, African American Resources–Cultural and Heritage.

Last March, a series of public meetings introduced the AARCH concept and attracted strong involvement Frederick City and County African American communities. More than 100 individuals attended meetings at Asbury United Methodist Church, a historically African American, activist congregation. After the meetings, volunteers left with AARCH project "lead sheets" to begin to identify African American heritage community resources.

A museum concept surfaced regularly during the initial phase of AARCH, and was the subject of a January 2002 planning retreat at Frederick Community College's conference center, hosted by the Catoctin Center for Regional Studies. The retreat began with panelists addressing the challenges of establishing a new museum. The panelists included Sandy Bellamy, Development Officer for the Maryland Museum of African-American History; Zora Felton, former Director of Education for the Smithsonian's Anacostia Museum; Barbara Franco, Executive Director of the Historical Society of Washington, D.C.; and Mary Alexander, Director of the Maryland Museum Assistance Program. Two informal discussion groups explored the museum idea and addressed possible AARCH projects.

Discussions suggested two piers for Frederick's AARCH, one that will address the feasibility of a museum facility. The other, "AARCHways" will pursue community projects such as oral histories, historical research, thematic tours, and others activities to build an audience or "set the stones" for the AARCH. "AARCHways" may be undertaken by museums and other partner organizations, as well as formal AARCH subcommittees. The first "AARCHway" is a self-guided African American tour. The brochure for the tour will be organized in two sections, the city of Frederick and Frederick County. The brochure is available at the Frederick Visitor Center, 19 East Church Street for $.50.

The City of Frederick section of the tour will focus primarily on West All Saints Street, where a thriving African American community developed early in the twentieth century. Stops of interest include the Free Colored Men's Library and Asbury United Methodist Church. Most stops on this section tour are within walking distance. The Frederick County sites are widely dispersed and must be viewed as a driving tour. This section emphasizes late nineteenth century villages and churches founded by African Americans, some of whom had been slaves. The villages include Centerville, Greenfield, and Pleasant View.

Grants from the Community Foundation of Frederick County and the Freedom Summer Celebration will support the self-guided tour. Overall support for the AARCH project as been provided to the Frederick County Historic Sites Consortium by a grant from the Maryland Historical Trust's Museum Assistance Program.

For more information, contact Liz Shatto, Coordinator, Frederick Historic Sites Consortium at 301/644-4042.

DISCOVER DALLAS! A Survey of Dallas' Architectural, Cultural, and Historic Properties

Katherine Dyll
Preservation Dallas

Preservation Dallas, with help from residents and volunteers, is documenting Dallas' significant architectural, cultural, and historic properties. This multicultural grassroots effort is both innovative and precedent-setting; never has a city this size utilized volunteers to collect survey data. Properties include residential, commercial, institutional, and industrial buildings constructed before 1965 and within the Dallas city limits.

Preservation Dallas's board members conceptualized the survey two years ago when they became frustrated with Dallas's current architectural surveys. Scattered

Students from Sunset High School *participated in the documentation of buildings near their school, as a part of the Discover Dallas! Resource survey. Photo courtesy of Katherine Dyll.*

throughout the city's repositories, these surveys are inaccessible to the public. They are also out of date and use disparate methods in determining a property's significance. With Discover Dallas!, the user will be able to search the resultant database by address, architect/builder, date, and style, as well as local, state, or national significance. Users will also find location maps and neighborhood assessments using geographic information system (GIS) and property tax data.

This is an ambitious project in yet another respect. Neighborhoods play a prominent role because the project begins with them. Neighborhood by neighborhood, Preservation Dallas teaches residents to train their eyes so they can better understand the forms that shape their environment. Residents record architectural details as well as note which buildings are most important to their community's culture and/or history.

In January 2002, the Leadership class from South Dallas' Sunset High School took part in Discover Dallas! by surveying the commercial buildings near their school. They began with an Art Deco building, today Tejano Mexican Restaurant and Club. A previous survey estimated a construction date of 1955; however, the students discovered an earlier construction date of 1939, when it opened as Wyatt's Cafeteria. Sunset student Stephanie Tackett remarked, "I could not believe all the histories behind [Tejano's.] Before now I didn't think anything about the buildings I pass by, but now...I look at them in a different way and find myself trying to determine different things about them." Knowing more about building history has made a remarkable difference in the way the students see their neighborhood, not to mention expanded their understanding of South Dallas.

The benefits of the project include reinvestment in historic properties, building residential pride in the uniqueness of the neighborhood, and empowering residents in the development of their community. The project has won the support of city officials, preservationists, and volunteers who recognize the urgency in recording the city's resources.

For more information about Discover Dallas!, call 214/821-3290, or visit the Preservation Dallas website at www.preservationdallas.org.

New Orleans Celebrates Its Shotgun Houses, Seeks to Save Them

In March, 2002, New Orleans celebrated Shotgun House Month, with events intended to showcase the vernacular architecture that

makes up a large percentage of the city's and the state's housing stock. The shotgun, a narrow structure with a front-facing gable and main door, can be found throughout the South, but is closely associated with Louisiana and its African American population. Over the course of the month, the Preservation Resource Center (PRC) of New Orleans held a Designers' Shotgun House Showcase, and presented lectures on the history of the house in New Orleans and how it relates to African Americans. The PRC offered a map for those interested in taking a driving tour of shotgun houses in one of five neighborhoods, and organized a walking tour of shotguns in Algiers. Most importantly, the PRC conducted a Shotgun Summit, on purchasing, maintaining and refurbishing shotgun houses.

James Perry of Operation Comeback, a program dedicated to neighborhood revitalization by helping people buy and renovate historic homes, gave attendees information on acquiring available homes using various methods including the Blighted Properties Removal Program. Operation Comeback is run through the New Orleans Redevelopment Authority (NORA) which acquires properties in and around the city, and offers them at auctions to prospective homeowners. The agency initiated its Real Estate and Landbanking Mechanism (REALM) in late 1999.

According to NORA Director Lisa Mazique, the strategy was devised to achieve three results: "First we saw the need to make available for development a pool of properties in distressed neighborhoods. Second, we knew that upfront costs and risks were keeping some interested buyers out of the program, so we wanted to eliminate those impediments. And third, we wanted to strengthen our mechanism for matching buyers with available resources to facilitate the timely removal of blight from neighborhoods."

As a result of NORA's "landbanking" efforts, a menu of attractive properties, in addition to shotgun houses, in local historic districts under the jurisdiction of the Historic District Landmarks Commission are available for auction. The four sessions at the Shotgun Summit was part of Operation Comeback's efforts to educate the public, offer ideas about possible renovation plans, as well as financing, provide the history of the housing type, and note the many famous New Orleanians who have lived in shotguns.

For information on New Orleans' Shotgun House Month, Operation Comeback, or the PRC, contact Mary Fitzpatrick at 504/581-7032, email: prc@prcno.org.

Preservation and Transformation in San Francisco: Friends of 1800

Gerry Takano
President, Friends of 1800

Like so many fledgling organizations, the San Francisco based Friends of 1800 evolved through the vigilant activism of uninitiated neighborhood preservationists. Dedicated to save the Fallon, a Victorian building at 1800 Market Street, the group's opposition to demolition threatened to divide an already politicized gay-lesbian-bisexual-transgender (GLBT) community: gay preservationists were pitted against other gays.

The Fallon has a colorful history, more than a century old. It was built by Carmel Fallon, granddaughter of General Joaquin Castro—the namesake of Castro Street—who was once married to Commander Thomas Fallon, former mayor of San Jose. A commercial and residential building, it eventually passed to Carmel's daughter, Anita, a well-known stage actress. The Fallon survived the 1906 and 1989 earthquakes, and was a home to gays, artists, and stage performers during the 1970s and 1980s. The announcement to raze the Fallon for a new GLBT Community Center ignited a major local preservation campaign. While thousands of signatures were collected in the Castro district to save the building, more seasoned activists presented compelling options to revitalize the Fallon. For several months, representatives from both sides began assessing the feasibility of maintaining the Fallon as part of the Center.

Finally, after much debate and discussion, the Board of the Community Center reversed its decision in favor of preservation. In early March 2002, the new GLBT Community Center, including the renovated Fallon and its modernist addition, was dedicated with gala events and highly publicized fanfare.

A singular issue such as the Fallon, however, could not sustain the organization's development. The Friends of 1800 Board set forth on new constructive and provocative preservation projects throughout San Francisco. The organization promoted the landmarking of various sites such as the Harvey Milk Camera Shop and initiated revisions to local landmarks regulations.

In addition, the Friends held an international conference during June 2001 entitled, "Looking Back and Forward, an exploration of the identification and assessment of significant GLBT sites." Attendees experienced alternative GLBT interpretations of the San Francisco City Hall with a focus on the day Harvey Milk, the first openly gay City Supervisor, and Mayor George Moscone, were assassinated during the years of new GLBT

political awareness and presence. The emerging GLBT geography of San Francisco's Tenderloin, Polk, and the Castro districts were also discussed.

Today, the Friends of 1800 organization is strongly allied with local mainstream preservation organizations, such as the San Francisco Architectural Heritage and the GLBT Historical Society of Northern California. The organization addresses a range of projects and promotes numerous local advocacy issues. A long ranged involvement with the City and County of San Francisco is a survey of hundreds of sites in the Castro, Noe Valley, and Western Addition neighborhoods.

Extending beyond San Francisco, the Friends of 1800 also provides outreach assistance to other organizations interested in the built environment. In Honolulu, Hawaii, for example, the Friends assists local groups in the interpretation and identification of GLBT sites, past and present.

For more information, visit the Friends website at friendsof1800.org. Gerry Takano can be reached at gertkno@aol.com.

Shinnecock Nation Cultural Center and Museum

Helga Christine Morpurgo

Two decades ago, a group of Shinnecock natives began the process of creating a cultural center that would allow them to preserve and recreate their own heritage, a culture that dates back almost 10,000 years. "Everyone has been our story but us," said Elizabeth Haile Thunder Bird, echoing a belief held by other tribe members. The Shinnecock Nation Cultural Center and Museum in Southampton, New York is the end result of their efforts.

TRIBAL ACTIVITIES

The 5,400 sq. ft. cultural center and museum, which opened its doors to the public on June 16, 2001, is of spiritual significance to Native Americans because it was built using traditional methods, with logs of white pine without the use of nails or mortar. The logs are fitted one atop the other and held in place by wooden pegs. A curved stairwell of halved pine logs leads to a lower level, transported in one piece from Oneida, New York where the structure was built by Obomsawin artisans.

The murals of native Shinnecock artist and historian David Bunn Martine complement the engineering of the construction. Martine's work recreates aspects of communal life during the course of Indian history, dating as far back as the Paleolithic era and as far forward as present day portraits of living tribal members. The larger-than-life paintings show authentic historic details that depict the evolution of terrain under the effects of climate changes.

The upper level will display many native artifacts, such as a small organ that had resided in the Reservation's Small Church when the church was still in existence. It also contains a hand-caned chair that had belonged to an ancestor who everyone on the Reservation had once known, a 400 year-old birch bark canoe, tools from every period of Indian history, an antique skin drying stand, and many other historic artifacts. Wampum, sewing tools, and other artifacts found during the construction of new homes in the Southampton area have been given to the Reservation.

The Museum contains a photograph gallery, an archive room for videos and recordings of verbal history, a kitchen facility, offices, and a storage area. There are plans for an amphitheater to serve as a setting for spiritual ceremonies, festivals, lectures, traditional dancing, demonstrations, drumming, and flute and vocal concerts.

The Shinnecock Museum is open by appointment for lectures and tours and Saturdays from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m.

For scheduling and information, call the Shinnecock Museum at 631/287-4923.

Outside the Boundaries

Gregg L. Bruff
Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore

National Park Service staff is occasionally involved in special opportunities to contribute to cultural heritage projects outside of park boundaries. In 1996, *The Face In The Rock* was published by Loren R. Graham, a Professor of the History of Science at Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Publication of the book was the culmination of a collaborative project between the author and local Anishinabeg tribal elders. Once the book was in print, elders then began working to increase awareness of both local and regional visitors of the story related by the book. This includes the historic rock carving of Powers of the Air, a Grand Island Ojibwa who helped guide the Lewis Cass Expedition on Lake Superior in 1820.

Eroded by the vagaries of Lake Superior weather, much of the foot-high carved sandstone image is still visible, though most local residents do not know its location or the story behind it. In 1996 local tribal elder,